



DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

For Your Information...

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

Like many other South Carolinians, you collect and sort items that can be recycled. That's good, because you are helping to reduce the amount of garbage going to the landfill. But whether you put items out for curbside pick-up, place them in recycling bins at school or work or even take them to a local recycling center, these actions are only one part of the recycling process. It may surprise you to learn that what you buy and how you shop is just as important as saving the things your recycling center takes.

Why? Because everybody shops. And shopping affects the environment. Everything we purchase has an impact, but some choices have less of an impact than others.

It is important when buying to make choices that support environmentally responsible products and packaging, make recycling easier and reduce the amount of garbage that is thrown away.

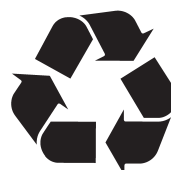
You can make a difference.

To make recycling work, you must buy recycled content products. Here are some simple ideas to keep in mind when shopping.

- **Bring your own reusable shopping bags.** This is the best way to avoid the paper versus plastic dilemma. Durable canvas or string bags are light and convenient to carry and can be used thousands of times. Reusable bags can easily become a habit and save an astonishing amount of paper and plastic over time. When you are shopping at the mall, combine bags instead of receiving a new bag for every item purchased.
- **Buy recycled paper packaging.** Pass up polystyrene (Styrofoam) egg cartons and choose paper cartons instead, which are made from recycled newsprint. For paperboard boxes (such as cereal and cracker boxes), the rule of thumb is: if the unprinted side is gray, it's made from recycled material. Most paperboard boxes have the "100% Recycled Paperboard" logo on them.
- **Buy in bulk.** This not only uses less total packaging, it also saves you money. Buy large single containers instead of the same volume in many smaller containers (e.g., two-liter bottles verses six packs). For any item with a long or unlimited shelf life (e.g., laundry detergent) or non-perishable foods you use regularly (e.g., cereals and grains), buy the biggest container you can. Put manageable amounts in reusable, smaller containers for everyday use.
- **Avoid throw-away products.** Avoid single or limited-use items such as throw-away cleansing pads, non-refillable pens, plastic razors and foil baking pans. Reduce or eliminate your use of disposable plastic diapers, which account for a startling two percent of the total U.S. landfill volume.
- **Avoid excess packaging.** Compare the size of the package to the size of the product. If the package is designed to take up as much shelf

When shopping, watch the words.

Look for the chasing arrows on the products you buy and read the label. Beware of the word "recyclable," which is not the same as "recycled," the word it closely resembles. Many materials are technically recyclable, but can it be recycled in your local program? If it is not recyclable in your community, consider an alternative product.



RECYCLABLE



MADE FROM
RECYCLED
MATERIALS

space as possible, choose a competing product. Do without products that are packaged inside more than one layer. Multi-pack juice boxes for children, made with layers of cardboard, plastic, aluminum and a plastic straw attached, are a particularly wasteful example. Avoid miniaturized “single-serving” packages. Buy fruit and vegetables loose. Choose products that are not in plastic trays and that do not have attached promotional materials.

- **Look at the container or packaging and think “recycling.”** Choose the container that can be recycled in your community. For example, if glass is not accepted for recycling in your community, avoid products packaged in glass containers. Avoid products that are difficult to recycle (e.g., many “squeezeable” plastics which are made of numerous layers of different plastics) and instead purchase the type of container that CAN be recycled locally.
- **Choose environmentally friendly, non-toxic alternative cleaning supplies.** Consider not using cleaners that are toxic or that you suspect may be toxic if the label says ‘Warning’, ‘Danger’ or ‘Poison’. Instead, buy cleaning products whose manufacturers list their natural ingredients on the label and purchase cleaners containing non-petroleum-based surfactants, that are chlorine and phosphate free, that claim to be “non-toxic” and that are biodegradable. Many environmentally sound cleaning products are available in natural food stores and in many supermarkets.

Recycled Content Myths

- **Recycled products are inferior in quality.** While this once was a problem, the quality of recycled products has improved. In many cases,



you cannot tell a difference between virgin and recycled content products.

- **There are only a few recycled products on the market.** There are now thousands of recycled products being sold, ranging from office, school and cleaning supplies to clothing and construction materials.
- **Recycled products are more expensive than other products.** Recycled products are often priced competitively with products made from virgin materials. Some even cost less.

Remember, small changes in everyday behavior can have positive consequences for generations to come.

Why buy recycled?

- **Buying recycled products reduces waste going to landfills.** Materials that do not go in a landfill are made into new products and not disposed of, so landfill space is conserved.
- **Buying recycled products reduces manufacturing waste and pollution.** In most cases, making products from recycled materials creates less air pollution, water pollution and waste than making products from virgin materials.
- **Buying recycled products reduces energy consumption.** Recycled products usually take less energy to make. Recycled aluminum, for example, takes 95 percent less energy to make than new aluminum from bauxite ore.
- **Buying recycled products creates and improves markets.** When you buy goods with recycled content, your purchases help to create a demand for materials collected in local recycling programs.



Office of Solid Waste
Reduction & Recycling

1-800-768-7348 ● www.scdhec.gov/recycle

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